



The Politics of Necessity: Community Organizing and Democracy in South Africa (Critical Human Rights)

Elke Zuern

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The end of apartheid in South Africa broke down political barriers, extending to all races the formal rights of citizenship, including the right to participate in free elections and parliamentary democracy. But South Africa remains one of the most economically polarized nations in the world. In *The Politics of Necessity* Elke Zuern forcefully argues that working toward greater socio-economic equality—access to food, housing, land, jobs—is crucial to achieving a successful and sustainable democracy.

Drawing on interviews with local residents and activists in South Africa's impoverished townships during more than a decade of dramatic political change, Zuern tracks the development of community organizing and reveals the shifting challenges faced by poor citizens. Under apartheid, township residents began organizing to press the government to address the basic material necessities of the poor and expanded their demands to include full civil and political rights. While the movement succeeded in gaining formal political rights, democratization led to a new government that instituted neo-liberal economic reforms and sought to minimize protest. In discouraging dissent and failing to reduce economic inequality, South Africa's new democracy has continued to disempower the poor.

By comparing movements in South Africa to those in other African and Latin American states, this book identifies profound challenges to democratization. Zuern asserts the fundamental indivisibility of all human rights, showing how protest movements that call attention to socio-economic demands, though often labeled a threat to democracy, offer significant opportunities for modern democracies to evolve into systems of rule that empower all citizens.

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